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VISITORS GUIDE

SAM RAYBURN HOUSE

— STATE HISTORIC SITE —
Bonham, Texas



Welcome to the Sam Rayburn House State Historic Site. Step into the warm and welcoming world of one of Texas' best known statesmen, Sam Rayburn. As one of the most powerful and influential politicians in the 20th century, Rayburn served 24 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. Today, the 1916 home preserves the real story of his life in Texas.

Original furnishings, candid photographs, and personal belongings remain as they were when the Rayburns lived here. Learn about Rayburn's personal life and political career that impacted mid-20th-century history. The grounds include Rayburn's farm, garden, original outbuildings, and Rayburn's 1947 signature Cadillac.



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THE FARM

In 1914, after his election to the U.S. Congress, Sam Rayburn purchased 121 acres of land two miles west of Bonham. By 1916, construction of his two-story clapboard home was complete. The surrounding farmland produced cotton, corn, sorghum, and provided pastureland for cattle. Rayburn's later additions to the home included several rooms and porches. By using his own money to pay the electric company to run poles and electric lines to his home in 1935, he assisted in bringing electric service to his rural community.



Rayburn family in the breakfast room.

Over the years, the farm was home to various family members. The original occupants of the home were Rayburn, his brother Tom, sister Lucinda, and their parents, William and Martha. Tom

Rayburn, the farm's manager, lived in the house until he married in the 1940s. Rayburn's second cousin, Minnie Eldridge, and Rayburn's brother Will also briefly occupied the home. Medibel (Rayburn) Bartley, Rayburn's sister, and her husband Edward moved into the home in the 1940s. Having been briefly married and divorced, Rayburn enjoyed being surrounded by family.

After his death, the home, land, and possessions were left to the Sam Rayburn Foundation. His sister lived in the house until her death in 1969. The foundation deeded the home to the state in 1972 and the home opened as a museum in 1975.



A LIFETIME POLITICIAN

In 1887, 5 year-old Sam Rayburn moved with his family from Tennessee to Flag Springs, a few miles from Bonham, to farm the fertile soil of the blackland prairie. As the eighth of 11 children, Rayburn grew up in a large family that never had much money but always had encouragement for his aspirations. Rayburn's interest in politics began when he was 12 years old after hearing Texas U.S. Congressional Representative Joe Bailey speak at a political meeting. Impressed with Bailey's oratorical abilities, Rayburn decided he too would one day become a great political speaker.

He began his legendary political career in 1906 when he ran for and won a seat in the Texas House of Representatives. He was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1912. During his 48 years in the House, Rayburn served as minority leader for four years, majority leader for three years, and speaker for 17 years, until his death in 1961. He remains the longest-serving speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

While a lifetime Democrat and party loyalist, Rayburn tended to be moderate on most issues, and he wasn't afraid to act independently or cut across party lines when he felt strongly about a particular issue.



Senator Clarence Dill, President Franklin Roosevelt, and Sam Rayburn signing the Emergency Railroad Act of 1933. Courtesy of the Sam Rayburn Museum, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas.

Rayburn had numerous legislative accomplishments. He authored the Truth in Securities Act, the Railroad Holding Company Bill, and the bills that created the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission. He co-authored the Rural Electrification Act in 1935, which brought electricity to most rural homes in the nation. Two years later, he guided President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs

through the U.S. House.

In 1944, concerned for rural citizens, Rayburn initiated a federal program to build farm-to-market roads. That same year, he helped pass a bill authorizing construction of the Denison Dam, which created Lake Texoma. When completed, the lake was the fifth-largest man-made reservoir in the world.

Whenever Congress recessed, Rayburn enjoyed getting away from the hurried lifestyle of Washington, D.C., preferring the quiet country surroundings of his farm. Although Rayburn had a congressional office on the square in Bonham,



Lyndon B. Johnson at Sam Rayburn's farm, 1954. Courtesy of the Sam Rayburn Museum, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas.

he chose to spend the majority of his time at his home where he set up an office in his sitting room. Constituents regularly visited the home to meet with him. Political figures such as President Harry Truman, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Fred Vinson, and Texas Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson were just a few of the high-ranking public servants who visited. Rayburn served in the Texas Legislature with Johnson's father and mentored Johnson in his early career. Rayburn was one of the strongest proponents of the Kennedy/Johnson Democratic ticket in 1960. Two years after Rayburn died, Johnson became president when Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in November 1963.



Sam Rayburn campaign rally, 1940.

Rayburn's fairness and mastery of the political process earned him respect from both sides of the House floor. His lengthy political career is attributed to his straight forward view of the political process and his honesty and integrity. Although his professional rewards were many, he rejuvenated himself at home, enjoying the simple pleasures of the country, and family life on the farm.